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ABSTRACT

Research has often indicated that African American male students are placed in special education in disproportionate numbers. Many reasons have been advanced for this disparity in placement, including placement and testing procedures, cultural differences, parent and teaching training problems, economic factors, and the failure of schools to educate them adequately. Disparities in representation of white and African American males in special education were studied in 10 cities, and the racial composition of the teaching staff was also studied. A relationship was found between the number of black male students placed in special education and the number of white teachers in the school system. The cities with the highest percentage of white teachers had the highest percentage of black students identified as "special." All the cities in the study exhibited excessive black male special education placement. It was expected that this would be worse in cities with many white teachers (white dominant) and less so in cities with many black teachers (black dominant). For the most part, this expectation was confirmed. Cities with the highest proportions of black teachers (Atlanta, Georgia and the District of Columbia) placed black males at the lowest rate. Cities with an intermediate level of black teachers placed these students at an intermediate rate. These cities included: (1) Cleveland, Ohio; (2) Miami, Florida; (3) Chicago, Illinois; (4) Houston, Texas; and (5) Detroit, Michigan. Finally, the cities with the lowest proportion of black teachers (New York, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and San Diego, California) were the least receptive to cultural, racial, and sexual differences. In these school districts, at least one out of every six black males would end up in special education. It is concluded that while dominance of the teacher racial group is an indicator of disproportionate special education placement, the influence of black administrative power, political economic empowerment, and cultural heterogeneity are important explanatory variables, as seen in Atlanta, Chicago, New York, Milwaukee, and Washington, DC. (Contains 3 tables and 34 references.) (SLD)

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The Disproportionate Placement of African Americans in Special Education: An Analysis of Ten Cities

by Janette Herrera

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Statement of the Problem

Why are African American males disproportionately placed in special education programs? According to Mercer (1973) a disability is an "abnormality where the individual differs from the average of the population on a particular skill or trait"(p.4)...."These categories must not be considered to objectively represent disability because they are bound to the parameters of normalcy defined by a given cultural group"(p.17). This definition sets the stage for the analysis of cultural implications in decisions about placement in special education programs.

Placement Procedures

Numerous models of what an effective placement process should consist of have been offered by education theorists and professionals in the field of special education. Jones reviews current models and offers a synthesis that suggests that these models have six basic components in common (Jones, 1979:17):

> First, a school-related problem is identified. The problem may be one of behavior, of achievement, of appropriateness of the administrative arrangement, or some combination of the above. Second, if former observations and/or assessments are deemed necessary, permission to engage in such activities is sought from parents/parent surrogates. Third, former observations and assessments by various specialists (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, resource consultants, speech therapists, physicians, and others) are obtained. Fourth, a planning team is constituted to integrate information received about a child and to make recommendations for further case disposition. Fifth, an instructional plan may be formulated. Sixth, follow-up is required (p.183).

Testing Procedures

In Zappardino's discussion she indicates that America's history of testing is rife with examples of how often flawed technology is misused to determine the fates of individuals. It shapes policy decisions and these decisions have perpetuated the disproportionate placement of

African American males in special education programs. Nowadays, diagnostic labels often follow individuals forever. Once these labels are applied, in many cases, they successfully create self-fulfilling prophecies. Today's terms may be more politically correct than, the "technical" terms used earlier in this century to describe different IQ levels, (i.e. moron, idiot, and imbecile) but the results are the same.

In countless school districts, tests continue to be used for tracking and placement of students from kindergarten through high school. Often, the tests used for this sorting process perpetuate segregation in the classroom. America is in the midst of a testing explosion. Tests, especially norm-referenced and multiple choice tests, have proliferated greatly over the past several decades. Increasingly, people feel their impact at many different levels in their lives. Testing often creates and reinforces barriers to equal opportunity based on race, class, gender, language, culture, and disability.

Proliferation of standardized tests over the last twenty to thirty years has given certain tests tremendous power over the educational system. Research has shown these tests to have damaging effects on curriculum and instruction, particularly for children from minority groups or low-income families (Zappardino, 1995). Beth Harry and Mary Anderson (1992) elaborate further regarding concerns with IQ tests as follows:

> The essential point of the critics is that IQ tests do not test innate ability; rather, they test an individual's learning in the numerous areas. They raise similar concerns about linguistic aspects of testing, arguing that expectations about students' language skills are determined by the standard language of the majority (Taylor & Lee, 1991). Education professionals are in urgent need of specific training in the administration and interpretation of speech and language tests (Adger et al., 1992). Therefore the entire testing process is biased by virtue of placing at a disadvantage those students whose cultural and social experiences do not include the kinds of information and skills tested by these instruments (Harry and Anderson, 1992).

Rate Differences

Rate *differences*, a third category, has also stimulated extensive study. According to Beth

Harry and Mary G. Anderson (1992), the disproportionate placement of students of a particular group in special education programs means the group is represented in such programs in a greater percentage than their percentage in the total school population.

Since the inception of special education programs, African American males have been disproportionately placed. It has even been asserted that they have been *targeted* for such placement. Lawsuits have been filed charging that placements of high numbers of Africa Americans, especially males, in special education classes has been a tool for resisting court-ordered desegregation (Harry and Anderson, 1992). The magnitude of these placements is shown in a 1993 US Department of Education study. This study reveals that blacks, 16% of the US elementary and secondary schools population, are only 8% of those labeled "Gifted and Talented," but are nearly 25% of those stigmatized as needing other kinds of "Special Education." See Table 1.

Table 1

Percentage of African American and White Students In Disability Categories (1986, 1990, 1992)

	Black			White		
	1986	1990	1992	1986	1990	1992
Total Enrollment in School System	16	16	16	70	68	68
Gifted & Talented	8	8	9	81	79	77
Educable Mentally Retarded	35	35	32	58	56	61
Trainable Mentally Retarded	27	32	29	60	46	58
Speech-Impaired	16	16	NA	73	73	NA
Severely Emotionally Disturbed	27	22	24	65	7	67
Specific Learning Disability	17	17	18	71	70	68

Source: Adapted from the US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights survey of elementary and secondary schools (1993).

Cultural Differences

The causes most frequently offered to explain this disproportionate representation include: (1) cultural differences that may lead to a predisposition to diagnose an emotional handicap, (2) a lack of uniform identification procedures, (3) bias in the assessment instrument used in diagnosis, (4) the attendant problems of poverty, and (5) a general pattern of racial discrimination in society reflected in school system (Serwatka, et al, 1995). Culture is collectively created by a group of people and shapes their patterns of interaction, communication, socialization, and education (Collier, 1988). It shapes how individuals perceive, relate to, and interpret their environment (Collier & Hoover, 1986). Writes (Serwatka, *et al*, 1995) on this point,

> The lack of awareness African American culture on the part of public school professionals allows for myopic perceptions of African American students. Some of them have to do with racial and cultural biases, while others are by-products of the actual conditions that disproportionately affect African Americans (p.492).

Consequently, students from different cultural backgrounds--in particular black males--may be placed in special education programs simply because educators, administrators and professionals are predisposed to see them as problematic (Cuban, 1989; Payne, et al., 1983).

Other conflicts often arise with the African American student when he or she is required to perform in a manner or in an arena that is inconsistent with his or her style of learning. The tendency for schools to ignore cognitive style sometimes engenders the negative mislabeling of the African American student as incompetent, lazy, or unwilling to learn. In essence, the educational institution tends to blame the child in these situations, rather than to focus on the "knowledge skills, and abilities that the children possess," and to build upon their strengths (Anderson, Means & Knapp 1988 & 1991).

Teacher and Parent Training Problems

Another placement problem is teacher and parent training. In this section, there are actually two areas where there is an issue of lack of and/or miseducation. First, there is a lack of appropriate education of teachers, in regards to the placement of African American students, in particular Black males. In some school districts, the teaching population is not culturally diverse. The literature suggests that "the lack of education and misunderstanding of parents concerning acknowledging and understanding cultural differences by the professionals plays a role in the pattern of low parental participation" (Gillis-Olsion, et al., 1986). This adds support and increases the problems of over inclusion of African-American students in certain special education classrooms and the lack of trust by the parents in the education process.

Zucker, et al., (1977) investigated whether regular classroom teachers displayed racial and/or gender bias in making referrals for special education placements. They found that when the teachers were told, that the child was Black or Hispanic, the child was more often judged as a candidate for special education placement than when a child was described as white.

Secondly, there is a lack of education and miseducation of parents concerning areas of exceptional education. Gillis-Olsion, et al., (1986) state, "a continuing problem in the public school systems is the pattern of low parental participation and the involvement in the educational process of African-American children with disabilities is proving to be very detrimental to the education system. Educational outcomes for young African-Americans are not always positive. Poor communications between professionals and parents has been cited as a reason why African-American parents are not receiving appropriate services for their children who experience disabilities" (Harrison, et al., 1995). African American parents are afraid that they will be looked upon as ignorant and/or unconcerned about their child. Parents are often distrustful because educators "talk down" to them by using educational jargonese. This causes parents to

limit their involvement in the communication with these professionals.

Failure of schools to educate children

This is an area that has been extensively researched (Allen-Meares, Paula et al., 1995). Inadequate education in the United States school system has perpetuated the behavior of black males which have them to be placed in special education programs. The problem may be inadequate instruction in the first place. Especially so in the category of Learning Disabilities (LD). Due to inequities, oppressive conditions, and uncontrollable stresses, individuals are turning against themselves, their loved ones, and others to vent their feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Many African American males are especially caught up in this cycle of violent behaviors and victimization and consequently are becoming an endangered species (Gibbs, 1984, 1988; Staples, 1987). The adverse consequences of this cycle-including major injury and death--will affect the future of African American males, their families, and generations to come. Society's level of concern says much about us as a nation. In addition, Tidwell, (1991), believes "the failure of the dominant society to educate the African-American male has caused a lack of economic and political participation in society." Society is paying and will continue to pay for the lack of adequate education of African American males. Rather than educate, schools label and refer the problem to special education. Clearly, the lack of appropriate education is a major factor in the future of African American males.

Economic factors

Both parents and educators may have an incentive for children to be placed in special education programs in particular African American males. For instance, a parent might put their child in a special education program to receive extra income, from sources like SSI or Medicaid,

to pay bills, their rent, or maybe buy a new car. For whatever the reasons, they do not realize the devastating effects on that child's life and future.

Next, the United States educational system is perhaps the direct contributor to the present predicament that African American males are facing due to their incentive gains. The public school systems are embracing programs to receive extra money. This was highlighted in a report in The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Sept. 1997, on "Schools use Medicaid to dodge revenue cap. Public is hit twice, critics say." In the report, "Briggs and others criticized the program for allowing reimbursements to be used not only for special education costs but to increase schools' overall spending on such things as computers, transportation and general operations." For example, in the Arrowhead School District, in the Town of Merton in Waukesha County, Stephen Kopecky, the district's business manager, argues that "It's an alternative source of revenue,' he said. "We're always looking for an alternative source to help offset some of the expenses." In addition, "Milwaukee Public Schools has joined the program and by itself expects to receive $5 million to $10 million a year in reimbursement." Both the parent and educators are placing students, in particular African American males, in special education programs, who perhaps do not belong there simply for monetary gains. In a conversation with Professor Western, he said, "Everybody has an incentive to expand special education but nobody has an incentive to rush an audit in special education programs in public schools."

The Hypothesis

In ten urban city school districts schools I tested the hypothesis that there would be no differences between the proportion of African American male students placed in special education programs by African American educators, compared to their white counterparts.

Method

I used data taken from Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; New York City, New York and Washington, DC. I first found out the total school district population of African American males. Next, I compared the exceptional education population percentage of African American males by race and gender. Then, I compared the racial composition of their teaching staff by race and gender.

Findings

Table 3 shows the student population, teacher population and special education population in ten selected cities. The columns of male/female students can be compared by race and gender against the teacher population. There is a relationship between the number of white teachers and the number of black male students placed in special education. The cities with the highest percentage of white teachers have the highest percent of black students identified as "special". For example, in New York City 35.7% of the student population are black children but 66.7% of the special education students are black males. Blacks are identified as "special" at almost twice the rate as other children. At the same time, the white teachers account for 77% of the teachers in N.Y.C. Following is a list that ranks the cities on this relationship:

1. New York
2. Milwaukee
3. Miami
4. San Diego
5. Cleveland
6. Houston
7. Atlanta
8. Detroit
9. Chicago
10. D.C.

Table 2
An Analysis of Black Male Placement
In 10 Selected Urban Public School Special Education Programs

	District	Ethnicity	Student Population Count	%	Teacher Population Count	%	Special Education Population Males	%	Females	%	Total	%
Georgia, Atlanta		Total	59,934	100.0	3,798	6.3	3,180	70.1	1,357	29.9	4,537	7.6
se%	7.6	Black	54,027	90.1	3,038	80.0	2,937	70.9	1,204	29.1	4,141	91.3
bse%	91.3	White	3,795	6.3	656	17.3	218	64.5	120	35.5	338	7.4
bmse%	64.7	Hispanic	1,136	1.9	46	1.2	13	34.2	25	65.8	38	0.8
bt%	80.0	N. American	27	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0	2	0.0
		Asian	785	1.3	9	0.2	3	75.0	4	57.1	7	0.2
		Multiracial	164	0.3	0	0.0	7	63.6	4	36.4	11	0.2
Illinois, Chicago		Total	428,184	100	25,323	5.9	13,943	67.0	6,855	33	20,798	4.9
se%	4.9	Black	230,053	53.7	11,071	43.7	9,064	67.2	4,427	32.8	13,491	64.9
bse%	64.9	White	44,035	10.3	11,422	45.1	1,522	68.4	703	31.6	2,225	10.7
bmse%	43.6	Hispanic	139,720	32.6	2,096	8.3	3,163	66.2	1,615	33.8	4,778	23
bt%	43.7	N. American	818	0.2	72	0.3	30	62.5	18	37.5	48	0.2
		Asian/Pac. Islander	13,558	3.2	161	0.6	164	64.1	92	35.9	256	1.2
Ohio, Cleveland		Total	76,225	100.0	4,525	5.9	6,243	66.9	3,090	33.1	9,333	12.2
se%	12.2	Black	53,913	70.7	1,552	34.3	4,118	66.2	2,102	33.8	6,220	66.6
bse%	66.6	White	15,168	19.9	2,809	62.1	1,594	68.0	750	32	2,344	25.1
bmse%	44.1	Hispanic	5,914	7.8	121	2.7	438	70.9	180	29.1	618	6.6
bt%	34.3	Am. Indian	221	0.3	9	0.2	20	66.7	10	33.3	30	0.3
		Asian	674	0.9	29	0.6	15	68.2	7	31.8	22	0.2
includes 4000 speech impaired		Multiracial	192	0.3	5	0.1	0	na	0	na	0	0.0
		Other	143	0.2	0	0.0	58	58.6	41	41.4	99	1.1
Michigan, Detroit		Total	177,057	100.0	8,745	4.9	8,332	68.8	3,770	31.2	12,102	
se%	6.8	Black	161,151	91.0	5,273	60.3	7,640	69.0	3,432	31	11,072	91.5
bse%	91.5	White	8,480	4.8	3,201	36.6	463	66.7	231	33.3	694	5.7
bmse%	63.1	Hispanic	5,251	3.0	114	1.3	182	70.0	78	30	260	2.1
bt%	60.3	Am. Indian	423	0.2	61	0.7	26	59.1	18	40.9	44	0.4
		Asian	1,752	1.0	96	1.1	21	65.6	11	34.4	32	0.3
Texas, Houston		Total	290,375	100.0	11,848	4.1	14,407	65.9	7,452	34.1	21,859	7.5
se%	7.5	Black	99,889	34.4	4,924	41.6	6,301	65.6	3,300	34.4	9,601	43.9
bse%	43.9	White	31,651	10.9	5,042	42.6	1,927	69.1	860	30.9	2,787	12.7
bmse%	28.8	Hispanic	150,995	52.0	1,693	14.3	6,022	65.2	3,216	34.8	9,238	42.3
bt%	41.6	Am. Indian	290	0.1	12	0.1	6	75.0	2	25	8	0.0
		Asian	7,840	2.7	178	1.5	151	67.1	74	32.9	225	1.0
Florida, Miami		Total	345,861	100.0	19,536	5.6	35,308	66.2	18,045	33.8	53,353	15.4
se%	15.4	Black	115,735	33.5	5,140	26.3	11,363	68.7	5,186	31.3	16,549	31
bse%	31.0	White	44,946	13.0	8,023	41.1	6,163	61.6	3,834	38.4	9,997	18.7
bmse%	21.3	Hispanic	179,484	51.9	6,194	31.7	17,332	67.5	8,342	32.5	25,674	48.1
bt%	26.3	Am. Indian		0.0	0	0.0	46	69.7	20	30.3	66	0.1
		Asian/Pac. Islander	0	0.0	0	0.0	300	33.0	608	67	908	1.7
(includes gifted)		Multiracial		0.0	0	0.0	104	65.4	55	34.6	159	0.3
		Other	5,696	1.6	179	0.9	0	na	0	na	0	0.0
Wisconsin, Milwaukee		Total	107,043	100.0	6,728	100.0	10,247	69.2	4,557	30.7	14,804	13.8
Se%	13.8	Black	65,617	61.3	1,250	18.6	6,731	69.3	2,982	30.7	9,713	65.6
Bse%	65.6	White	19,910	18.6	4,996	74.3	2,056	69.2	914	30.8	2,970	30.6
Bmse%	45.5	Hispanic	13,702	12.8	244	3.6	1,132	69.4	498	30.6	1,630	54.9
Bt%	18.6	Am. Indian	1,177	1.1	27	0.4	87	66.9	43	33.1	130	8.0
		Asian	5,031	4.7	57	0.8	110	64.3	61	35.7	171	131.5
		Other	1,606	1.5	154	2.3	131	68.9	59	31.1	190	111.1
New York, New York		Total	933,503	100.0	62,273	100.0	100,908	66.6	50,665	33.4	151,573	16.2
Se%	16.2	Black	333,374	35.7	11,928	19.2	39,681	66.7	19,826	33.3	59,507	39.3
Bse%	39.3	White	191,542	20.5	41,093	344.5	15,105	65.9	7,818	34.1	22,923	15.1
Bmse%	26.2	Hispanic	319,715	34.2	8,255	20.1	40,666	66.5	20,453	33.5	61,119	40.3
Bt%	19.2	Asian	81,593	8.7	646	7.8	3,707	67.1	1,821	32.9	5,528	3.6
		Am. Indian/Alaskan Native	2,097	0.2	351	54.3	1,730	70.2	733	29.8	2,463	1.6
		Other	5,182	247.1	0	0.0	19	57.6	14	42.4	33	0.0
California, San Diego		Total	137,496	100.0	7,240	5.3	8,437	66.7	4,214	33.3	12,651	9.2
Se%	9.2	Black	23,186	16.9	603	8.0	1,926	65.5	1,013	34.5	2,939	23.2
Bse%	23.2	White	38,979	28.3	5,568	73.5	2,976	67.3	1,447	32.7	4,423	35.0
Bmse%	15.2	Asian	3,556	2.6	0	0.0	382	65.2	204	34.8	586	4.6
Bt%	8.0	Filipino	11,096	8.1	0	0.0	341	71.5	136	28.5	477	3.8
		Alaskan/Indian	880	0.6	69	0.9	66	61.1	42	38.9	108	0.9
		Hispanic	49,025	35.7	1,000	13.2	2,679	66.5	1,348	33.5	4,027	31.8
		Indonesian	9,460	6.9	0	0.0	0.0	na	0.0	na	0	0.0
		Pac. Islander	1,314	1.0	0	0.0	67	73.6	24	26.4	91	0.7
DC, Washington		Total	78,000	100.0	5,273	6.8	2,850	66.0	1,465	34	4,315	5.5
Se%	5.5	Black	68,102	87.3	4,435	83.6	2,651	65.9	1,372	34.1	4,023	93.2
Bse%	93.2	White	3,097	4.0	679	12.8	61	67.8	29	32.2	90	2.1
Bmse%	61.4	Hispanic	5,655	7.3	159	3.0	134	68.4	62	31.6	196	4.5
Bt%	83.6	Asian/Pac Is	1,076	1.4	0	0.0	4	66.7	2	33.3	6	0.1
		Am. Indian/Alaskan Native	70	0.1	0	0.0	0.0	na	0.0	na	0.0	0.0
	10 Cities	**Total**	2,633,678	100.0	155,289	100.0	203,855	100.0	101,470	100.0	305,325	100.0
		Black	1,205,047	45.8	49,214	31.7	92,412	45.3	44,844	44.2	137,256	45.0
		white	401,602	33.3	83,489	169.6	32,085	34.7	16,706	37.3	48,791	35.5

NOTES: special education (se), black special education (bse), black male special education (bmse), black teachers (bt)

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Explanation of Findings

Table 3

Black Male Placement Summary									
		A	B	c	D	e	f	g	h
	City	Teacher ratio	(bt) %	(se) %	(bse)%	black placement %	(b, w) placements	m/f ratio	dominance ranking
1	Atlanta	0.22	80.0	7.6	91.3	10.8	(9, 17)	1.02	BD
2	Chicago	1.03	43.7	4.9	64.9	7.7	(13, 29)	1.05	ND
3	Cleveland	1.81	34.3	12.2	66.6	14.8	(7,10)	1.07	LWD
4	Detroit	0.61	60.3	6.8	91.5	9.3	(11,18)	1.03	LBD
5	Houston	1.02	41.6	7.5	43.9	12.1	(8,16)	1.09	ND
6	Miami	1.56	26.3	15.9	31.0	18.8	(5,7)	1.09	LWD
7	Milwaukee	4.00	18.6	13.8	65.6	19.9	(5,10)	1.06	WD
8	New York	3.45	19.2	16.2	39.3	23.2	(4,13)	1.06	WD
9	San Diego	9.23	8.0	9.2	23.2	15.9	(6,13)	1.09	WD
10	Washington, DC	0.15	83.6	5.5	93.2	7.6	(13,51)	1.04	BD
11	**Average**	**2.31**	**41.6**	**10.0**	**61.1**	**14.0**	**(8,18)**	**1.06**	
Notes se = special education bse = black se bmse = black male se * = W or B		a) white teachers/black teachers b) black teachers/ total teachers c) se population/ total population d) bse/ black population				e) bmse/ black male population f) SE placement rate per 100 students for (black, white) males g) males/females h) *D (3:1) L*D (3:1 - 2:1) ND (2:1 - 1:1)			

Teacher Dominance Rankings

Column "g" in Table 3 ranks the selected cities as White Dominant (WD), Light White Dominant (LWD), Neutral Dominance (ND), Light Black Dominance (LBD), and Black Dominance (BD) depending on the white-to-black teacher ratio. When this ratio exceeds 3 to 1, the city is assigned to either the WD or BD category; when this ratio is between 2 to 1 and 3 to 1, the city is assigned to either the LWD or LBD category. Cities whose white-to-black teacher ratios are less than 2 to 1 are considered neutrally-dominant (ND). By this classification schema, Milwaukee, New York, and San Diego are considered White Dominant, Cleveland and Miami are Light White Dominant, Chicago and Houston are Neutrally Dominant, Detroit is Light Black Dominant, and the cities of Atlanta and Washington, DC are Black Dominant.

Overall Summary

While all cities in the study exhibited excessive black male special education placement,

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this excess should be worst in White Dominant cities and least in Black Dominant cities. For the most part these expectations were confirmed. Cities with the highest proportions of black teachers (Atlanta, Washington, DC) placed black males at the lowest rate. Correspondingly, cities with an intermediate level of black teachers (Cleveland, Miami, Chicago, Houston, and Detroit) placed these students at a higher rate. Finally, the cities with the lowest proportion of black teachers (New York, Milwaukee, and San Diego) were the least receptive to cultural, racial, and sexual differences. Consequently, at least 1 out of 6 of every black male in these school districts will end up in a special education.

Exceptions and Anomalies

Teacher dominance is an *a priori* indicator of disproportionate special education placement. In addition to teacher dominance, moreover, black administrative power, political economic empowerment, and cultural heterogeneity are important explanatory variables. We can see this in Atlanta, Chicago, New York, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Washington, DC.

Implications

It is clear that maleness is a critical concern in placing students in special education. What are the consequences of subjecting an average of 1 in 8 black males to special education? Since the United States annually educates nearly 35 million males in public schools to unnecessarily stigmatize 13% of these[1] is to subject nearly half a million of these boys to a greater liklihood of above average imprisonment and drug abuse, below-average incomes and social stability.

[1] The average black male placement rate of 14% minus the "healthy society" special education rate for males of 1%.

It is imperative that the educational institutions examine their own internal structures, in preparing teachers to meet the needs of the African American males. Teacher training programs and local system in-services, should include information on different cultural styles, and how to teach using methods that recognize the individual differences of the students. Ford (1992) believes that professionals need to be exposed to accurate information about various cultural ethnic groups. Professionals should be required to know the historical and contemporary contributions of different cultural groups, lifestyles, value systems, interpersonal communication patterns, learning styles, and parental attitudes about education and disabilities.

> "Educators need to be aware of the diversity that exists within cultural ethnic groups. The importance of multicultural education can't be stressed enough because the regular classroom teacher's decision to refer the child is the single most important decision that is made in the assignment of children to learning disabilities (LD) programs" (Berrien, 1993, p. 790)

African American teachers are needed in general education classrooms. After the administrators, who set the special education quotas[2], the teachers are the most critical link (kink) in the process. Serwatka *et al.*, (1995), for example, found that black over-representation decreases with increasing proportions of black teachers. Findings like these make it clear that more black teachers will reduce the disproportionate placement problem. It is imperative that white teachers be required to take extensive "antiracist education (Kailin, 1994. Such may qualify them to teach children of color.

An examination of this data leads one to question why we have not yet faced how racism may impact the thinking and behavior of many white teachers who are responsible for the evaluation and education of our children. It's not surprising that we see such negative impact on our black children.

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[2] See discussion of Atlanta in the findings

Finally, a special effort needs to be made by professionals in special education to empower African American parents of children with disabilities. This empowerment will go a long way toward reducing the number of black males who get shanghaied to special education programs. Educators need to be sincere in their efforts to enable parents to communicate their needs. Commitments should be made by the school systems to educate parents on the special education process, services, and programs. Parents need to clearly understand their rights, their children's rights, and their responsibilities as parents. Parents also need to be informed of what advocacy services are available. Home visits should be made in an effort by the professionals to relate to families of children with disabilities.

As we enter into the year 2000, it is important that educators support African Americans so that they effectively function in the school setting. However, they are but one part of the educational gestalt. Ultimately, change involves the active restructuring of the all school systems--including educational organization, training programs, curriculum, and methods. Richard Wright reminds us of the transformative powers of education; Langston Hughes' raisin is an unforgettable image of the consequences of its absence.

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